

Kate Daubney. *Max Steiner's Now Voyager: A Film Score Guide*

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In the first of what promises to be an exciting and useful series of film score guides,¹ Kate Daubney has given the reader the benefit of her years of research² from a wide variety of original sources on Max Steiner and his film scores. These sources include Steiner's unpublished autobiography, *Notes to You*, and an interview with his third wife. *Max Steiner's Now, Voyager: A Film Score Guide* is a well-written and insightful discourse on Max Steiner's contribution to the art of film music.

Daubney begins her discussion with "Max Steiner's Musical Background," a detailed account of Steiner's Austrian roots, including his Viennese childhood, his music studies, and his early musical career. The reader gains a clear understanding of Steiner's musical influences, from his childhood music lessons, from his work at the Vienna Imperial Academy of

Music, and from his experience with Viennese operetta and eventually with Broadway.

One wonders if similar biographical information will be included in each film score guide. With potentially dozens, perhaps hundreds, of film score guides on the music of Steiner possible, will a biography be included in each guide?³

The second chapter, "Steiner's Technique of Film Scoring," is an enlightening glimpse not only into the process of composing and orchestrating film music but also into the personality of this composer. Using a writing style that is as easily understood by the student as it is by the professional musician, Daubney gives the reader a clear picture of the daily routine of a film studio's music department.

While discussing Steiner's technique of film scoring, Daubney presents an argument for

diatonic versus chromatic musical language, but it is not very convincing. The example of diatonic music from *The Oklahoma Kid* is in B-flat major, but it cadences on an A-flat major chord, a chromatic chord (on the lowered seventh degree) in the key of B-flat. The chromatic example from the same film includes what appears to be a chromatic note, B-natural, but it can easily be understood as a diatonic note in the key of C minor. The section on orchestration, however, is very concise and brilliantly written.

The third chapter, "Historical and Critical Context of *Now, Voyager*," places the film, its cast, its characterizations, and its audience in the proper historical light. *Now, Voyager* was filmed in the early 1940s, during World War II, when the typical American moviegoer had an appetite for war dramas and any film with a patri-

¹ The first two books in the series, on Max Steiner's music for *Now, Voyager* and Bernard Herrmann's music for *Vertigo*, were published by Greenwood Press. Additional books in the series will be published by The Scarecrow Press Inc.
² Daubney's dissertation, "The View from the Piano: A Critical Examination and Contextuali-

sation of the Film Scores of Max Steiner" (University of Leeds, 1996), discusses several of Steiner's scores from 1939 to 1945 with reference to the historical context in which they were composed. The dissertation includes an extended analysis of Steiner's score for *They Died With Their Boots On* (Warner Brothers, 1942) and a

brief discussion of the score for *Now, Voyager*.
³ Since writing this review, the author has learned that each film score guide will discuss a different composer. Therefore, only one score by each composer will be included in the series.

otic theme. There was at the same time, however, an audience for women's pictures, that is, melodramatic romances suitable to the young wives left at home while their husbands were overseas. Daubney's insightful perspective on these issues, as well as several social themes (marriage, sexuality, adultery, unwanted children, etc.) touched upon in the film, make this chapter an essential part of a comprehensive understanding of the audiences' viewing experience and the role of Steiner's score in that experience.

The section of this subchapter titled "Critical Interpretations of *Now, Voyager*" provides a concise synopsis of the film. The main character, Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis), is a repressed spinster who transforms into a loving mother figure throughout the film. Jerry Durance is her lover and the father of the child, Tina, for whom Charlotte assumes the role of motherhood. Elliot Livingston represents the security that Charlotte thinks she wants. Mrs. Vale is Charlotte's mother, from whom Charlotte desperately seeks to gain permanent independence. Charlotte's psychiatrist, Dr. Jaquith, is somewhat of a father figure from whom Charlotte will also eventually gain independence.

Chapter four, "The Music and Its Context," gives the reader an insight into Steiner's approach to scoring a film during the most prolific years of his career. It becomes clear that composing film music was easy for him and that his thematic approach worked well in a wide variety of film genres. His success at composing in several genres is obvious by the critical acclaim he received during the 1940s.

The final chapter in the book, "An Analysis of the Score," is an

ambitious attempt to present some but not all of the complexities of the score for *Now, Voyager*. Unfortunately, Daubney completed her analysis without the aid of the cue sheet—a detailed listing of the music that is used in each musical cue, its timing, composer, publisher, etc.—for this film. In spite of that fact, her analysis is an insight into the formal structure of one of Steiner's most sophisticated scores.

As with a study of any score written in the leitmotif style, recognizing and identifying the themes that represent the characters and situations in the film's narrative is essential, and Daubney does this quite well. Her analysis of the themes and their use throughout the film includes some perceptive observations on Steiner's treatment of each theme as the story unfolds. The musical examples are very useful, but they contain minor notational errors, such as notes and accidentals that collide. Some of the harmonic analysis is unreasonable. For example, what is described as a subdominant eleventh chord is really a subdominant ninth chord with an appoggiatura or, sometimes, a 4-3 suspension. Ninth chords occur infrequently in tonal music, but true eleventh chords are indeed quite rare.

In a score such as this, a character's theme is typically heard when the audience first sees that character. It should be noted that Steiner wrote music for the first appearance of Dr. Jaquith in the film, but that music was not included in the film's final edit (Cue 5d: Reel 1, Part 2, measures 46-66).

There is another appearance of Dr. Jaquith's theme that calls for some explanation. Charlotte has returned home from a South

American cruise and is about to see her mother again. She pauses outside of the door to her mother's room and recalls something that Dr. Jaquith had said to her. Contrary to what Daubney states, the theme that is heard is indeed Dr. Jaquith's, but it is hard to recognize. Steiner uses the technique of augmentation, or the stretching out of the theme's rhythmic values, to make the theme almost unrecognizable. In fact, this cue is the same as the music we hear shortly after Charlotte first meets Jerry. There is a flashback to Dr. Jaquith as he was seeing off Charlotte near the gangplank of the cruise ship and giving her advice.

The theme that Daubney labels as the "Expectation" theme is better understood as "Jerry's theme." Daubney quotes Steiner as saying "Every character should have a theme." In fact, Jerry does have a theme and we hear a fragment of it when Jerry first appears in the film. We hear it several times while Charlotte is thinking about him, hence the "expectation" mood. It is an elegant theme that reflects Jerry's charm and gentleness.

On one occasion, Steiner cleverly uses this theme to tell us that Charlotte is thinking about Jerry when there is no other mention of him in the film's narrative. Charlotte has returned home from the South American cruise. Jerry has sent her flowers. Charlotte's mother insists that Charlotte tell her who sent the flowers. Charlotte evades the question, but the music we hear tells us the answer. It is Jerry.

One way in which this chapter could be more enlightening is if it included more discussion of key relationships, an important facet of any score in the Wagnerian

tradition. For example, throughout the score Steiner uses G major as Charlotte's main key, while G minor is her "serious" key. B-flat major is used when Charlotte and Jerry say "Good-bye," the key of A major represents happiness, C major represents Charlotte's inde-

pendence, and D-flat major, a tritone away from Charlotte's main key, represents tranquility.

The conclusions at the end of this chapter are brief and leave the reader wanting more. The notes that appear after the last chapter should not be overlooked. The

bibliography is a list of essential resources for any film scholar.

Max Steiner's Now, Voyager: A Film Score Guide is a welcome addition to an increasing pool of literature on film music. See this film, read Kate Daubney's book, and then see the film again.

Reference

Daubney, Kate. 1996. *The view from the piano: A critical examination and contextualization of the film scores of Max Steiner*. Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds.